

My name is Kathleen Redmond and I am a volunteer with PAVe, Parents Against Vaping E-Cigarettes here in Connecticut. I support the elimination of all flavored vaping products along with menthol and all flavored tobacco products. Please pass SB326.

I have partnered with PAVe because this issue is deeply personal for me. My son was 13 when he was first offered flavored e-cigarettes. Like so many teenagers, his desire to be accepted set him up for addiction. He vaped only flavored products. He was told they were not harmful. They came in candy flavors. How could they be? His social media feed was filled with attractive people vaping. Not only is it safe, he thought, it's also cool and everyone is doing it. He was all in.

Unfortunately, his use of flavored e-cigarettes led to tension in our parent-child relationship at a time in his life when he needed my guidance the most. It became a very unhealthy dynamic. Instead of parenting, I was policing, and no matter what guidance I offered, he was on defense. When I tried to take away his nicotine products, it was like I was trying to deprive him of oxygen. It became a constant battle. This led to lots of shame and anger for both of us. He was 15, and I had confiscated his Juul; he searched the house and demanded it back. After an emotional discussion, where I tried to reason with him, he became so desperate, like a different person, and held a large kitchen knife against his throat, threatening to harm himself if I did not give him back his Juul. Just as I was about to relent, my husband called an ambulance, which was the right thing to do. A child who had never shown any propensity for self-harm, threatened to kill himself over nicotine. Because he was hooked by these flavored nicotine pods at such a young age, he threatened to take his life when he could not have them. Let that sink in.

The life saved that day continues to be put at risk every day by nicotine. Drawn in by these candy flavors, my son, now 19, is hooked and faces a lifelong battle with addiction to nicotine. Getting hooked at such a young age derailed a promising future. My son needed nicotine to function. He could not get through a 40-minute high school class without multiple hits on his Juul. He would ask to be excused from class, and when he was reprimanded for that, he refused to go to school. Because he was not allowed to vape in the house, he holed up in his room, constantly sneaking

around. He became isolated, even more anxious. What he thought was an avenue to social acceptance, became a solitary activity, as he was shunned by those friends who did not vape; he felt terrible shame for that. Every day, he became singularly focused on where he was getting his next nicotine hit. If it were not for the pandemic, and school going remote, I doubt he would have finished high school.

Given his low grades and lack of engagement, college is a deferred hope. Even now, he has difficulty getting through a part-time job because he needs smoke breaks, and what little money he makes is mostly spent on nicotine products; and it is always menthol flavor. He has admitted that he hates the pods that are not flavored, and would not have been as attracted to vaping had the pods not been flavored.

Nicotine is the most addictive substance on the planet, and yet, we, as a society, had finally driven the smoking rates down, only to be blindsided by this new method of hooking an entire generation, my son included, on this addictive substance. These flavored pods have put our children at risk for cancer, vaping related illnesses, severe Covid, and mental health issues. It's a national nightmare.

I watch every day as my son lives his own nightmare, bound by the chains of addiction, anxious, depressed, isolated, stuck. It is too late to save my son from this turmoil. I pray he can weather it, and someday overcome it. He has a long road back. But, it is not too late for other young people. Please do what you can to ensure that they are not robbed of a better life. Please do not let large corporations pick the pockets of our vulnerable youth, stealing their health and happiness. Please pass SB 326.